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The Evaluation of Implicit and Explicit Instruction in Chinese Refusals: A Case of a Japanese Learner

Introduction

A speech act is an utterance that functions in communication. Speech acts can be divided into several types including apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, and refusal. Those speech acts, according to Garcia (2004), are essential to communicative competence. Pragmatic competence is an important constituent of communicative competence, which refers to the ability to use language appropriately in various social situations. Studies on pragmatic competence, especially for adult foreign and second language learners, according to Eslami-Rasekh (2005), demonstrates that “grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development and that even advanced learners may fail to comprehend or to convey the intended politeness values” (199). According to Koike and Pearson (2005), many studies have proved that pragmatic ability is teachable. Similar studies include Eslami-Rasekh (2011), which indicates that most studies in the field of English have demonstrated that pragmatic instruction has a positive impact on developing learners’ awareness. Also, Chang (2009) claimed that, although native Chinese speakers experience pragmatic transfer from their L1, less proficient students tend to transfer more L1 strategies than higher-level students.

According to Zhou (2007), refusal can be regarded as a response, rather than an initiating act, to a request, invitation, offer, or suggestion. Duan and Wannaruk (2010) explains that because refusals “normally function as second pair parts, they preclude extensive planning on the part of the refuser” (p.94). Therefore, refusals might be more complicated than other speech acts and difficult to teach. They are also face-threatening negative speech acts, according to Brown and Levinson (1987).

More attention has been given to refusal strategies of Eastern and Western populations (e.g. Chinese vs American). In contrast, the differences between refusals used among East Asian counties seem to attract less concern. Second, only a few studies explore methods of teaching refusal. Third, although some studies focused on the effect of refusal instruction in English, very few are about the issue of Chinese refusal. Last, almost no study investigates the effect of Chinese refusal instruction focused on learners who come from a country that shares a culture similar to China (e.g. Japan).

This paper, therefore, focuses on a Japanese speaker and evaluates the effects of instruction on learning Chinese refusals. In order to extract not only the effect of instruction

but also the learner's background in Chinese refusal, not only is a discourse complete task (DCT) applied to measure learner's pragmatic awareness, but also interviews investigate the learner's background information.

Literature Review

Given the focus of this evaluation, this paper reviews studies on refusal from the following aspects: comparison of Chinese and Japanese refusals, and the methods and effects of refusal instruction.

Studies on Comparison between Japanese and Chinese Refusals

As both countries locate in the East Asian area, China and Japan share the same Confucius culture. Their refusal strategies, therefore, should be similar. Hong (2011) indicated in her paper, "The tradition that East Asians generally prefer – an indirect mode of communication – originates in the legacy of Confucius: to consider others and maintain proper and harmonious human relations" (p.132). Such preference, according to Hong (2011), is "illustrated in Ueda's (1974) 16 ways to avoid saying "no" in Japan and Ma's CFVC proposal (1996) for the Chinese way of saying "yes" for "no" (p.132).

However, slight differences still exist between Chinese and Japanese refusals. Brown and Levinson (1987) established politeness as socially determined by rank of imposition, social distance, and relative power. China and Japan both are under the influence of Confucius and regard "politeness" as an important factor in social interaction. Therefore, in order not to hurt each other's image, those three categories should be considered when making refusals.

Kano and Mei (2002) investigated the refusal expressions of Japanese, Chinese, and Chinese Japanese learners in the same situation of borrowing a camera but based on four different relationships between the requestor and the refuser (close friend and superior, not close friend and superior). They found that compared with Japanese, Chinese people initiate refusals by stating the reason first (while the Japanese make apologies first). Also, the Chinese show the most consideration to their close superiors by never using direct refusals such as 不行, 不可以 ('I can't'). According to Huang, Tamaoka and Bulaeva (2014), in most cases, close superiors could bring some interest to the speakers in the future; therefore, it is important to maintain good relationships. Kano and Mei (2002) also found that Chinese people use fewer direct refusals to their close friends than to their not close friends. Based on these findings, they assumed that the Chinese people pay more attention to the social distance (close/not close relationships) than power relationships (social status), while the Japanese pay more attention to power relationships since they differentiate the use of "I am sorry" according to the interlocutor's social status.

Similar to Kano and Mei (2002), Meng (2010) found that Chinese speakers appeared to use more specific reasons, most of which are about their families. On the other hand, the Japanese tended to use vague reasons, and rarely use reasons about their family because in Japan such issues are considered private, and if used in a public case, would sound like an excuse. Also, when making alternative plans, in the case of Japanese speakers, the request was deferred to the interlocutor. However, Chinese speakers appeared more receptive of the interlocutor's requests and more "likely to direct him or her to a third party who could fulfill the request" (p.1). It is also very interesting that only Chinese speakers propose to treat the interlocutors in a manner to maintain good relationships with them, or ask for help from their close superiors; in China, people who are close are supposed to help each other.

Li (2015) found that refusal expressions of Chinese and Japanese speakers differ in apology and the use of appellation. In almost all the cases (whether the social distance is close or not close) Japanese speakers tend to apologize. However, Chinese speakers use fewer apologies, and they use extremely fewer apologies to people who are close to them and who share the same social status, which is only about 30%. Regarding the aspect of appellation, Chinese speakers tend to use more appellations towards people who have higher social status than Japanese speakers.

Although as indicated by most studies, social distance is considered the most important factor in making refusals, power relationship is also important. According to Li (2013), towards their not close superiors, Chinese speakers use words such as 恐怕 ('I am afraid'), 有可能 ('It is possible that'), and 好像 ('it seems') to soften their refusal expressions and avoid speaking about the conclusion directly to keep the interlocutor's positive image. A similar idea was found in Yang (2008); after analyzing 60 video clips regarding refusal collected from Chinese television series, she found that, "compared with a request of equal status, more alternatives and strategies of avoidance are employed to refuse a requester of unequal status" (p.1056).

Studies on Effect and Method of Refusal Instruction

Duan and Wannaruk (2010) conducted an experiment comparing learners' refusal performance between an explicit instruction group and an implicit instruction group. The major finding of their studies was that both types of instruction affected learners' pragmatic performance, although the explicit instruction was more effective than the implicit instruction.

Nipaspong and Chinokul (2010) claimed that prompts help to develop EFL learners' pragmatic awareness more than explicit and implicit feedback. Prompts refer to a response to a learner's error by providing not the right answer, but rather a fix hint to help him or her

discover the answer by him-/herself.

About how to teach refusals, unfortunately, the existing studies on pragmatic instruction focused on various kinds of speech acts, but not the case of refusal. Nipaspong and Chinokul (2010) divided the learning process into five steps adopted from Yoshida et al, (2000): feeling, doing, thinking, understanding, and using. Feeling is the introduction of the target speech act, which is intended to raise student's awareness of the function of the speech act making production to solve the communicative tasks by themselves. Thinking is a step in which students are given a set of conventional expressions and are asked to discuss whether they are appropriate in a certain context. Understanding is the process that introduces other varieties of English (readings about English usage by other cultures) students to enhance their understanding of relationships between language and culture. The last step, Using, refers to the activity in which learners use the expressions from the thinking step to complete tasks. The teacher feedback was provided during the "doing" and "using" steps.

Duan and Wannaruk (2010) also explored the method of teaching refusals. They take a four-step approach: in the first step, presentation of target form, learners are asked to listen to a dialogue and answer questions regarding refusal realizations; in the second step, explanation of the target form, either the teacher explains the form explicitly (in an explicit instruction group) or students discuss usage of the form (in an implicit instruction group); in the third step, the planning session, learners work in pairs to prepare for role play based on the situation in the dialogues; in the last step, the communication session, learners use the target form in conjunction with extended discourse and to act out the dialogue.

Evaluation Question

As mentioned before, most studies focus on identifying differences of refusal in various cultures instead of teaching refusals. What's more, regarding the teaching of refusals, like the two studies mentioned above, most focus on English instead of Chinese, and take a non-Western vs Western approach (e.g. Chinese speakers learning English). In the case of Chinese, it is, of course, important for Westerners to learn Chinese refusals because of the distinctive culture differences. But it is also important to explore the necessity of whether the Japanese people should learn Chinese refusals. Also, different from the former studies, because the Japanese culture is similar to the Chinese one, to explore whether explicit or implicit instruction is more effective should be meaningful, since it examines the same problem from a different perspective, which would provide more insight into the question.

This paper, therefore, aims to provide some substance into these gaps. In order to have a whole image of the learning process, this paper focuses on the learner and tracks his learning for one semester. The main evaluation questions are as follows:

- (1) Will it be necessary for the Japanese to learn Chinese refusals?
- (2) Do explicit and implicit instruction make differences in teaching Chinese refusal to Japanese learners?

Methodology

Description of the Participant

The learner who participated in the study is a Japanese native speaker who studies Chinese at an American university. Prior to arriving in the U.S, the learner had neither experience of learning Chinese nor staying in China. Although compared to American learners, he had advantages in learning Chinese because China and Japan share the same characters as well as large parts of homographs. As he mentioned in the interview, almost no instruction about Chinese refusal took place in the Chinese classes he was taking.

Procedure

The whole process was divided into three steps. The first is pre-instruction. A DCT that covers all three categories (social status, power relationship, and imposed rank) of Brown and Levinson (1987)'s politeness theory was applied. More specifically, the DCT has eight situations: 1) to refuse a close professor's request to attend a lecture, 2) to refuse a not close professor's request to attend a lecture, 3) to refuse a close professor's offer to give a presentation, 4) to refuse a not close professor's offer to make a presentation, 5) to refuse a close friend's request to loan him/her a large amount of money, 6) to refuse a not close friend's request to loan him/her a large amount of money 7) to refuse a close friend's request to check a Japanese article; and 8) to refuse a not close friend's request to check a Japanese article. During this stage, the learner was also interviewed regarding his attitude toward refusal learning.

The second stage is implicit instruction. The learner was given a set of examples for each situation in the DCT test. Each situation has one example based on the results of the studies or taken from the studies in the first part of the literature review (which investigates the differences between Chinese and Japanese refusals). Then the learner was asked to answer questions regarding the differences between various situations (see Appendix). The author provided no comments on the learner's answers, however, tried to give hints (usually by asking another relevant question) to help the learner understand the questions. After the learner finished the question sheet, he was asked to produce refusals in the same situation in the DCT with the author. Again, even if the learner made a mistake regarding pragmatics, the author didn't provide him explicit feedback, but only repeated the incorrect part to help the learner notice his mistake.

The third stage is explicit instruction. First, the learner was given four sets of

examples of Chinese refusal of the situations in the DCT. Each set has eight examples including three examples indicating people who are close to each other, three examples indicating people who are not close to each other, and two examples that are appropriate for Japanese refusal but not Chinese refusal. The learner was asked to identify which was which as a review of what he had learned during the second stage. After that, the learner received the correct answer and discussed his answers with the author, including the reasons why he chose the answers. Then, by working on the question sheet about refusal strategies, which was also used in the second stage, the author explained the refusal strategy explicitly, and answered any questions the learner had. After this, the learner had a communication activity with the author, in which he was asked to produce his own refusal under the same situation in the DCT test. The author provided him explicit feedback anytime he uttered a pragmatically inappropriate response.

Results and Discussion

The Result of the Pre-test

According to the interview, the learner had no experience learning Chinese refusal in classroom or a study abroad environment. The learner did not have any pragmatic awareness, since when the author asked him whether there are any difference in Chinese and Japanese refusals, or whether he had problems communicating with Chinese people, he replied that Chinese itself is difficult for him, and he thinks his current fluency level is not enough for him to notice the difference. The student's refusal strategy, therefore, could be assumed to come from his Japanese knowledge. This assumption is supported by his following answers during the interview after he completed the DCT, in which he mentioned that all the knowledge of refusal strategies came from his native language, since he translated what he said in Japanese into Chinese.

When analyzing refusal strategies, the author will adopt some of the Hong (2011) categories, 1. Expressing explanations, 2. Addressing with title, 3. Expressing thanks, 4. Apologizing, 5. Promising future events, 6. Providing alternatives, 7. Wishing, 8. Direct refusal, and 9. Express regret.” (p.127)

According to the results, the learner did not distinguish answers according to social distance. For example, when refusing the professor's request of attending a lecture, whether close or not close to the professor, his answer remained the same: (1) 我说我很忙, 或者我有事儿. “I will say I am busy or I have something to do (Expressing explanations).” In addition, it seems that although he used the same expression when refusing close and not close superiors, later he indicated in the interview that he felt more sorry for professors who are not close to him when making refusal. While on the other hand, for close refusals, he would be able to say

it out directly that he can't make it.

Regarding the reasons for refusal, the learner's answer indicated what has been mentioned in Meng (2010) that the Japanese prefer to use vague reasons. When refusing the professor's invitation to make a presentation, regardless of the social distance between the learner and the interlocutor, the learner's answer is as follows:

(2) 我说我太忙了。I will say I am too busy (Expressing explanations).

The learner used many refusal strategies in the situation when his friend asked him to check a Japanese article. The reason for this was, as indicated in the interview, because he thought that the rank of imposition is the lowest here, which made him most difficult to refuse the request. He also said, "If I refuse this request in real life, I feel that no one would like to be friends with me." His answers are as follows:

(3) To a close friend: 对不起, 我真的很想帮你, 可是我今天太忙了。所以我不能帮你。下次我一定要帮你。I am sorry (Apologizing). I really want to help you (wishing), but I am too busy today (Expressing explanations), so I can't (Direct refusal). But I promise I will help you next time (Promising future events).

(4) To a not close friend: 对不起。今天我太忙了, 不能帮你。我可以问别的日本朋友。I am sorry (Apologizing). I am too busy today (Expressing explanations), so I can't help you (Direct refusal). I can ask another Japanese friend instead (Providing alternatives).

However, when the rank of imposition increases in the same situation (to refuse a request from a close and a not close friend for borrowing a big amount of money), the learner simplified his refusal strategies and said the follows:

(5) To a close friend :对不起, 我真的没有钱 I am sorry (Apologizing), I don't have the money (Expressing explanations).

(6) To a not close friend: 我没有钱 I don't have the money (Expressing explanations).

Discussion of the Results: Should Japanese learn Chinese refusal?

Because of the limitation of the data, the result may not represent the typical refusal strategies of Japanese; however, the learner's answers could still reflect some points that have been mentioned in the literature review part. First, the learner kept on saying that he was busy without indicating the reason for it. According to Hong (2011), Chinese refusals from students to professors "were considerably more strategic when the native speaker made every effort to attend to the professor's *mianzi* ('face') by providing more genuine reasons" (132). Specific reasons, therefore, could be more convincing in Chinese refusals; in contrast, vague reasons may be regarded as impolite. Second, according to Kasper (1995), in Chinese culture,

there is a common assumption that the refuser would not be the recipient of the initiating act if he/she were not honored by the requester. Also, as Kano and Mei (2002) indicated, the Chinese show the most consideration to their close superiors; therefore, more refusal strategies should be applied in the case of close superiors. Also, the rank of imposition is higher since asking for a big favor also means the requester honored the interlocutor. However, the learner's answer used many refusal strategies (making apology 对不起 'I am sorry', showing regret 我真的很想帮你 'I really want to help you', and alternatives 下次我一定要帮你 'Next time I will definitely help') in the case of a friend when he/she was asking for a small favor. In contrast, regarding a big favor, a friend's request to borrow a big amount of money, the learner refused the requestor by simply saying "I do not have the money," which would hurt the requestor's image and would be considered inappropriate in Chinese culture. Last, as indicated by Li (2015), it is important to use appellations especially towards people who have higher social status. However, the speaker, clearly influenced by Japanese culture, neglected that point. From all the above analysis, we can reach the conclusion that it is important for the Japanese to learn Chinese refusals.

The Result of DCT after Implicit Instruction

Both the learner's answer to the question sheet and the DCT indicated the learner made some progress in understanding Chinese refusal. First, the learner noticed that Chinese people tended to mention their family and give a more detailed reason for refusing a superior. The following are both the student's response to the DCT (7a~14a) and the examples given to the student (7b~14b). For example, when refusing the request from a professor to make a presentation, the learner's answers were:

To a close superior:

(7a) 我下周要交很多作业，我现在必须要做，如果我下次不忙的话，我就帮你做。 I have much homework that is due next week. I have to finish it right now (Expressing explanations). If I am not busy next time I can help you (Promising future events).

(7b) 我有个三年没见的朋友来找我，如果明天晚点的话应该会有时间。 I have a friend who comes to visit me, and we haven't seen each other for three years (Expressing explanations). I should have time later tomorrow (Providing alternatives).

To a not close superior:

(8a) 我的父母从远方来看我，他们住得离我很远，我们一年只能见一次面，不好意思。 My parents are coming to visit me. They live very far away from me, and we can meet only once a year (Expressing explanations). I am sorry (Apologizing).

(8b) 我报了学习班，今天正好有课，所以这次可能没办法帮您，不好意思。 I have

classes today (Expressing explanations), so I am unable to help you this time (Direct refusal). I am sorry (Apologizing).

Also, when refusing the request of a professor to attend a lecture, the learner tried to give more detailed reasons.

To a close superior:

(9a) 我有很多作业，没有空，我下次一定去。I have much homework to do (Expressing explanations) so I do not have time (Direct refusal), but I will come next time (Promising future events).

(9b) 老师，我最近身体不舒服，趁着明天下午有空，打算去人民医院检查一下。Professor (Addressing with title), I have not felt well recently. I plan to go to hospital tomorrow afternoon (Expressing explanations).

To a not close superior:

(10a) 真的不好意思，我妈妈来看我，所以我不能去。I am sorry (Apologizing). My mother is coming to visit me (Expressing explanations), so I can't go (Direct refusal).

(10b) 明天我妈妈生日，我已经约好陪妈妈去度假，所以我可能去不了啦。真是不好意思啊老师。Tomorrow is my mother's birthday. I plan to travel with her (Expressing explanations), so I am unable to go (Direct refusal). I am so sorry (Apologizing), professor (Addressing with title).

In addition, the learner also noticed that Chinese people usually apologize to people who are not that close, which could be inferred from the following examples in the situation of checking a Japanese article:

To a close friend:

(11a) 我现在太忙了，不能帮你。可是下次你有作文的时候我一定帮你检查。I am too busy and can't help you right now (Expressing explanations, Direct refusal). But next time I will help you (Promising future events).

(11b) 真不巧，我妈今天大老远跑来看我我一天都得陪着她啊。下次见面的时候我请你喝饮料做弥补啊。What a coincidence (Express regret)! My mother came to visit me and I have to be with her the whole day (Expressing explanations). Next time I will treat you a drink as an apology (Promising future events).

To a not close friend:

(12a) 对不起，我太忙了，不可能帮你。我帮你问问别人吧。不好意思。I am sorry (Apologizing). I am too busy, and I can't help you (Expressing explanations, Direct refusal). I will see if someone else can help you (Providing alternatives). I am sorry (Apologizing).

(12b) 今天我一天都要面试啊，估计没有时间帮你看。抱歉。I have interviews the whole day today (Expressing explanations). I may not be able to check your article (Direct refusal). I am sorry (Apologizing).

The same phenomenon could also be observed from the request to borrow money.

To a close friend:

(13a) 我没有太多钱，所以我不可能借给你那么多钱。但是两个月以后我也许可以借给你一半。现在加油。I don't have much money (Expressing explanations), so I can't loan you so much money right now (Direct refusal). But in two months I may be able to loan you half of the amount (Promising future events).

(13b) 我现在也只剩一点生活费啦。不过我帮你想想办法吧，我朋友很多的可以问问他们。I only have little money left (Expressing explanation). But I can ask my friends to see if they could do anything for you (Providing alternatives).

To a not close friend:

(14a) 我没有太多钱，所以我不可能借给你那么多钱。你问问别人吧，不好意思。I don't have much money (Expressing explanation), so I can't loan you so much. (Direct refusal). Please ask someone else (Providing alternatives). I am sorry (Apologizing).

(14b) 唉，刚给家里寄钱了，现在手头也很紧张，所以实在是不能帮你啊，不好意思。I have just sent money to my family and do not have much left (Expressing explanation). I am so sorry (Apologizing) that I can't help you (Direct refusal).

However, there are still some points that the learner hasn't noticed if we compare his responses with the examples. First, although all the examples start from stating the reasons, the learner sometimes still starts from making an apology, which could be seen as the negative pragmatic transfer of his L1, such as in examples (10a) and (12a). Second, although the examples intentionally distinguish using direct refusal according to the social distance between the requestor and the responder, the learner used direct refusal in both cases [(11a) and (12a); (9a) and (10a); (13a) and (14a)]. Third, using appellations is missed from the learner's responses although it is observed in the given examples. Last, although the examples used words such as 可能('probably') (10b, to soften their refusal expressions, avoid saying aloud the conclusion directly, and to keep the interlocutor's positive image in the case of not close superiors) it is missing in the learner's data.

The Result of DCT after Explicit Instruction

After the explicit instruction, according to the DCT, most of the problems revealed before did not reappear. The learner did distinguish his using direct refusal according to social distance, in examples (15) and (16), when refusing a professor's request to attend a lecture:

(15) To close professor: 老师, 明天我得去我哥哥上的第一次课, 要是下个星期我可以帮你。Professor (Addressing with title), I have to attend my brother's first class tomorrow (Expressing explanations). I should be able to help you next week (Promising future events).

(16) To not close professor: 我这个周末, 为了拿奖学金, 有面试, 恐怕我不能帮你, 不好意思老师。I have an interview this weekend for a scholarship (Expressing explanations). I may not be able to help you (Direct refusal). I am sorry, (Apologizing) professor (Addressing with title).

Also, about using words to soften the direct refusal could be observed as well, such as 恐怕 ('probably') in example (16). The use of appellations, could be observed as well, however, is missing from some answers, such as in examples (17) and (18), when refusing a professor's request to make a presentation.

(17) To close professor: 这个周末是我的最好朋友的生日, 我想给他惊喜, 所以我得准备, 这个周末以后一定帮你。My best friend is going to have his birthday this weekend. I want to prepare a surprise for him (Expressing explanations). I will help you after this weekend (Promising future events).

(18) To not close professor: 这个周末我有期末考试, 所以我得学习准备考试, 不好意思, 我不能帮你。I have final exams this weekend, which I have to prepare for (Expressing explanation). I am sorry (Apologizing).

Chinese people prefer to initiate the apology by stating the reason first to get empathy from others. The learner's answers all start with stating the reason instead of apologizing first.

Conclusion and Limitations

The results of this evaluation indicate the following conclusions. First, Chinese refusal is teachable. The learner improved his refusal strategies remarkably and was able to change his refusals in different ways according to different situations. Second, explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction when teaching Chinese refusals. Third, it is, of course, necessary for Japanese to learn Chinese refusals. In fact, pragmatic transfer could be observed in the learner's DCT before the instruction (e.g. to apologize first, not distinguish refusals according to the social distance, and use vague reasons), which could be considered inappropriate in Chinese culture.

Some pedagogical implications arise from the evaluation as well. First, when teaching refusals, it is helpful to create situations that include Brown and Levinson (1987)'s three categories regarding politeness theory in order to cover situations that would happen in real life as much as possible. Second, when teaching Chinese refusals, it is ideal to focus on the difference between the Chinese refusal and the one in the learner's first language and

introduce the cultural background. Because of the complexity of the patterns of refusal strategies, sometimes it is difficult to say something is absolutely correct or wrong; therefore, to identify and focus on the refusal expressions that work in learner's first language is not thought appropriate in Chinese languages becomes important.

However, limitations also exist. First, there was only one participant for this study. The fact that the instruction method was effective for him does not mean it would be for other learners since everyone has a different learning habit and prefers a different teaching method. Second, all of the DCTs (except the first one) were answered right after the class instead of sometime later. To test the effectiveness of the instruction, it may be necessary to test the learner two weeks or one month later.

Appendix

Refusal question sheet

1. Rank the difficult level of refusal in all situations (from the most difficult to the least difficult, High (H) means people have high social status. Low (L) means people have low social status)

Attending a lecture:

①H- L(close) ②H- L (not close)

Invitation to make a presentation:

③H-L(close) ④H-L(not close)

Borrowing money:

⑤L-L(close) ⑥L-L(not close)

Checking article

⑦L-L(close) ⑧L-L(not close)

⑤③①⑦④②⑥⑧

2. Try to find difference between your answer and the recording.

3. Are there any differences between refusing close and not close superiors? What about close and not close friends?

4. Are there any differences between refusing close superior and friends? What about not close superior and friends?

5. Are there any differences between refusing close superior and not close friends? What

about not close superior and close friends?

6. Can you conclude in general, how to refuse a superior appropriately in Chinese? What about a friend? Do you think closeness matters? How?

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